

Ecomaps: Tools to support a complex assessment

What is an Ecomap?

The ecomap gives a picture of the family in their own environment, i.e. their lifestyle as it is at the present time. It provides information such as a description of all household members, their relationships, interests and activities.

The ecomap looks at resources outside the household that are available for family members and explores potential areas of stress which may put pressure on the household, such as unemployment or worrying financial commitments (the type of social support available to a family and the degree of involvement in the community have been cited as important contributors to successful school age foster care). Community involvement provides support as well as important checks and opportunities for monitoring of parenting techniques, which is considered a valuable deterrent for child abuse. While the household members are participating in drawing up their family map, valuable information may be obtained by observing household dynamics, ie. how the partners relate and how they interact with their own children and other people.

Instructions for Ecomapping:

1. Draw a large circle in the middle of the map. This represents the members of household.
2. Inside the large circle, draw a genogram that describes the makeup of the household. It is often useful to add names and ages. Limited space may prevent adding additional descriptive information.
3. Inquire into what outside systems influence the family unit and its members. Examples of these outside systems may include work, extended family, church, school, health care, social welfare, recreation, and friends. Draw smaller circles around the large household circle and label them to represent the outside systems.
4. The next step is to begin to draw the connections of the family unit and its individuals to the various systems in their environment. These connections are indicated by drawing lines between the family and the circles representing the outside systems.

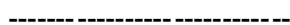
Some of the connections may be drawn to the family unit as a whole or to the individual members. This differentiation demonstrates the way the various family members are connected to the environment.

The nature of the connection is described by the type of line that is drawn:

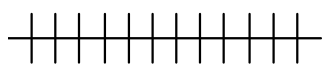
Lines joining the circles show connections:



= strong connection



= weak connection



= stressful connection

Arrows along lines show direction of flow of energy

(Source: WA Department for Community Development)

Sample questions to guide an ecomap

A family worker can identify important aspects of the family's environment by asking each family member about the various systems with which they interact. For example:

How would you describe your involvement with:

- Health care?
- Extended family?
- Recreation?
- Education (School)?
- Church (Religion)?
- Work?
- Friends (And so on)?
- What kinds of resources and supports are available to you? (housing, income, parenting, emotional etc)
- What agencies have you had contact with in the past? What supports were provided by them?
- What kinds of additional resources and supports do you think you need?

Example of an Ecomap:

